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THE ACADEMIC COMMITTEE
ADDRESSES OF RECEPTION

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ROYAL SOCIETY OF LITERATURE

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ADDRESSES OF RECEPTION

TO

Mrs. ALICE MEYNELL

By Henry Newbolt

TO

G. LOWES DICKINSON

By A. C. Benson

Award of the EDMOND DE POLIGNAC PRIZE

TO

RALPH HODGSON

By J. Masefield

Chairman's Address by GILBERT MURRAY

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 27th, 1914

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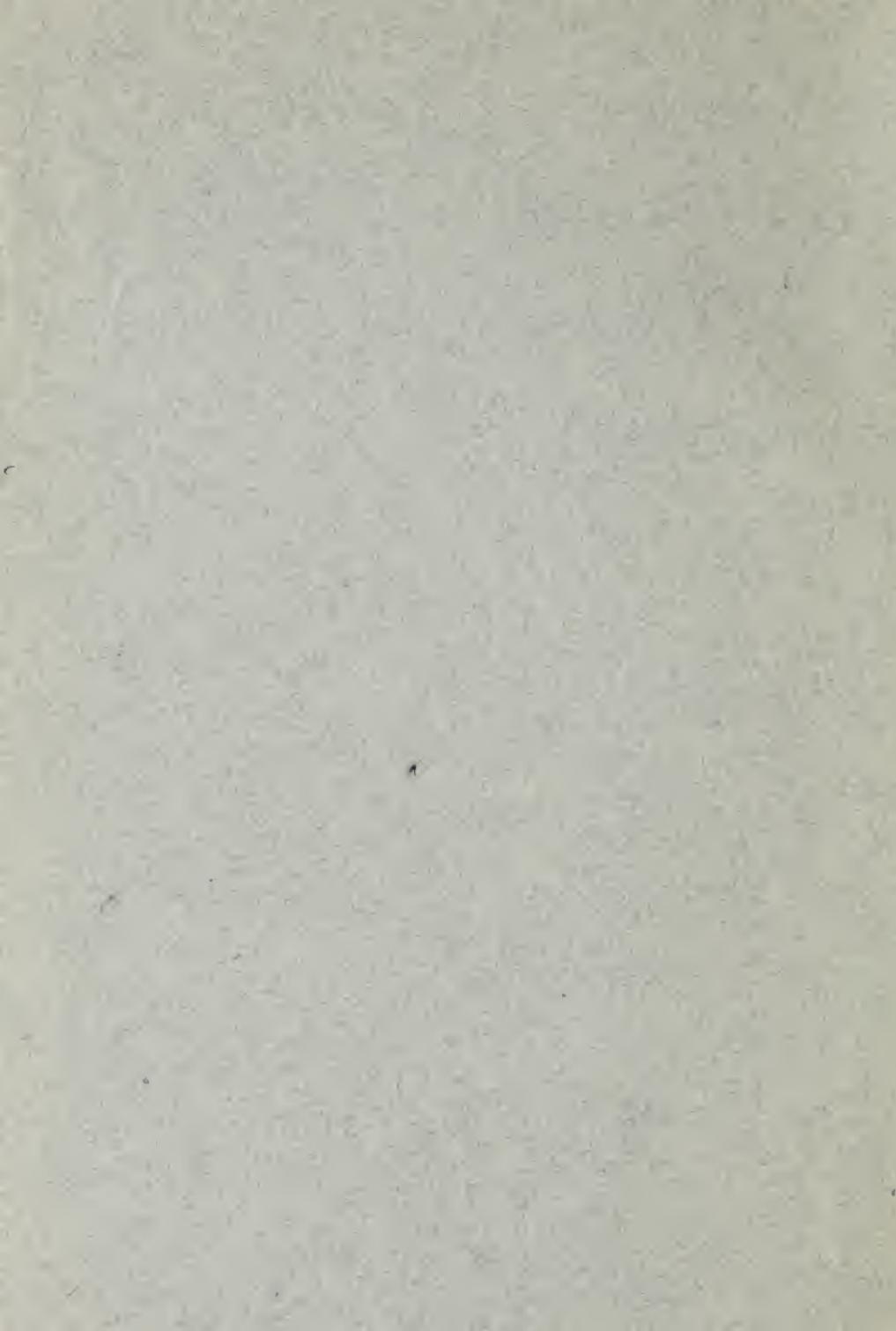
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THE ACADEMIC COMMITTEE.

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EDWARD HENRY PEMBER died April 5th, 1911.
ALFRED COMYN LYALL died April 10th, 1911.
ARTHUR WOOLGAR VERRALL died June 19th, 1912.
ANDREW LANG died July 21st, 1912.
EDWARD DOWDEN died April 4th, 1913.
GEORGE WYNDHAM died June 2nd, 1913.
ALFRED AUSTIN died June 8th, 1913.

PERCY W. AMES,
Secretary.

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ACADEMIC COMMITTEE.

MEETING AT 20, HANOVER SQUARE.

Friday, November 27th, 1914.

CHAIRMAN: PROFESSOR GILBERT MURRAY.

CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—We meet to-day in an abnormal atmosphere. *Inter arma non silent Musae.* The Muses are not silent, but amid the clash of arms not many people will listen to their voices. It is, therefore, all the more incumbent on societies like ours to remember that, even while as Englishmen we are fighting for our national life, we must in our own province preserve and if possible enhance those elements in life which make it precious.

We have to-day to hear the award of the Polignac Prize for the piece of imaginative literature which in the opinion of the Sub-committee is the finest of the last year, or, more strictly speaking, of the last year but one. We have also to receive into our ranks two new members. Mr. Lowes Dickinson is not only a master of his art as a writer ; he always brings to my mind a saying of Cicero's that, though the word eloquence is often superficially used, it is not a superficial quality—you cannot have real *eloquentia* without *sapientia*. Half the charm of Mr. Dickinson's writing lies in the intense thoughtfulness, the mellow wisdom, which pervades the delicate periods. Of Mrs. Meynell I feel impelled to tell a story which may seem, not only egotistic, but even impertinent, for I fear it makes a direct contrast to what I have just said about Mr. Dickinson. Many years ago, being ill and in some pain, I found it comforting to mutter verses to myself, and happened to be saying over and over some very beautiful lines of Mrs. Meynell's. Now, this is a habit which leads to misunderstandings. In order to make

it clear that I was not delirious, I said the words once quite distinctly to the nurse, with the result that she reported that, though my temperature was nothing out of the way, I was constantly muttering to myself, and further had addressed her in words which, though there was no harm in them whatever, were perfect nonsense. I hope Mrs. Meynell will forgive me for recalling this criticism. I am sure that Milton and Shakespeare themselves would have fared no better.

We meet, as I said, in a strange atmosphere. The war, with all its ramifications and consequences, is changing the quality of our private lives and either enriching or blunting our experiences, and we cannot but wonder what the effect of it will be on English literature. At the very start it affected different writers in different ways. A great many were stirred into poetry; others, of whom I was one, were actually repelled from poetry. My spirit hungered at once after blue books and white papers, statistics, and the annual of the Navy League. There lies here an interesting difference in

temperament between different people who are equally genuine lovers of poetry. With some the immediate concrete emotion tends to express itself in verse; with others the emotion that produces verse must be a little further off, contemplated through some veil or medium. This latter class, I believe, is the commoner. The Armada, coming in a great age of poetry, produced almost no poetry. Waterloo did not find its proper commemoration in English till 1846 or 1847 in 'Vanity Fair.' Even the 'Persae' of Aeschylus, which sometimes ranks as the one great poem about a contemporaneous event known to literature, was not written till the men who fought at Salamis could look back at the battle through a mist of eight years.

We shall not know for a generation or so how this great experience will affect our national literature; but many people will feel what a distinguished novelist said to me the other day, "I shall never write the same books again."

It may conceivably produce in the main a reaction against the romance of battle and adventure. I am told that war stories are at

present down in the market, and that the potentates who direct the subjects of *feuilletons* in newspapers have issued orders on that basis. It is no good competing with the stories which the soldiers themselves bring home. From my talks with wounded soldiers I should say that this criticism was sound. It is not simply that the soldiers' stories are so good; sometimes they are, sometimes not; but it is not wise to compete with them, to put the imitation beside the reality. And also you do not come away from them longing for more on the same subject. They themselves feel the reaction. More than once, in sitting among wounded privates, I have heard the cry, "Now, no more about war!" and I know one private who has turned his biggest battle into a rather stiffly-written poem, more or less in the style of Scott.

But a mere recoil is hardly ever the main result of a great positive experience. I should say that within the last few months the emotional experience of most of us, if we can analyse it now with the cold-blooded observation of the artist, has moved in two ways. We

have been brought nearer to the fundamental emotions—nearer to death and violence and horror and heroism; nearer to fear and hate, and, most emphatically, nearer to love and loyalty; and at the same time we have, partly in response to the practical need of the time, and partly by the natural instinct of self-protection, greatly increased our power of resistance. In a peaceful and untroubled life an artist enjoys his sensitiveness; he gets more out of life by being acutely conscious of subtle shades, delicate joys and disappointments, ironies, and reflections. But now nearly every man, artist or no, has to defend himself against all unnecessary sensitiveness. He has to be helpful and keep his head and not grumble. His imagination is to be used as an important critical instrument for making right judgments and preserving his mental and emotional balance, never as a luxury or a self-indulgence.

We have all in our different degrees to make some attempt at developing a soldierly spirit. What that spirit is is explained—officially and authoritatively explained—on p. 2 of the little

sixpenny manual called 'Infantry Training, 1914': "The objects in view in developing a soldierly spirit are to help the soldier to bear fatigue, privation, and danger cheerfully; to imbue him with a sense of honour; to give him confidence in his superiors and comrades; to increase his powers of initiative, of self-confidence, and of self-restraint; to train him to obey orders, or to act in the absence of orders for the advantage of his regiment under all conditions; to produce such a high degree of courage and disregard of self that in the stress of battle he will use his brains and his weapons coolly and to the best advantage. . . ." It is a fine character; and without a shadow of doubt it can be and is produced in our soldiers. But it certainly strikes one as extraordinarily different from the character that generally produces art and imaginative literature. . . .

At least under modern conditions. In other ages it was perhaps otherwise. And I am not sure whether one of the deep intangible differences from ourselves which we feel in Greek poetry of the classical times is not mainly due

to the presence of this soldierly spirit, a spirit trained in hardship and in comradeship, alert to stand by a mate and defy an enemy, a spirit more interested in doing than in feeling, and capable of stronger and deeper emotions just because it is accustomed to resist them and is seldom their willing prey.

However that may be, it is a great principle in all art that, after the pursuit of high technical accomplishment, after prolonged solitary study, it is always a wise thing to "steep oneself again in Nature," "*se retremper dans la Nature.*" And assuredly our experiences in these last months are compelling us to do that. On all sides of life we seem to have broken through the surface and settled into something older and deeper. I do not know if the experience of others agrees with mine; but in talk with wounded soldiers I have been constantly struck by the presence and the strength of emotions so simple, and sometimes even so noble, that in ordinary social life we hardly believed in them or hardly mentioned them without a smile. Instead of a world in which

people were apt to be slightly irritated by their colleagues and vexed with their near relations, we have struck on one in which the tears come into men's eyes as they speak of their mates in the firing line or their people at home. Even a sentiment so vast and remote as the love of one's fellow-countrymen seems to have become a live thing, and the sacrifice of self for others is regarded almost as a matter of course. I remember a parenthesis—a mere passing parenthesis—in a soldier's story. "Now 'B' Company 'adn't 'ad any food that day, because, you see, they'd given their rations to some refugees. So . . ." But I must not be betrayed into anecdotes. I will only mention further my belief that in one other immense field, in the relations between men and women, a vast amount of false antagonism and superficial ill-adjustment has been simply burned out of existence like thorns in the fire; and that in answer to the sternest of calls men and women have, for the most part, "fallen in" in their right places and proved again their indefinable and inestimable value one to another.

It is the older and deeper things of life that make the best art and poetry. And if it is true, as I think it is, that our present troubles have brought us nearer to those older and deeper things, then, I think, we artists and writers have only to endure and be confident. We may pass through a period of insensibility and of stubbornness, a period in which the things of the intellect will seem to have gone under. But it is certain that, sooner or later, the arts that we love will prove to have drawn fresh vitality and fresh power of blessing from the blood and tears of mankind. It is a thing that has happened before.

To MRS. ALICE MEYNELL.

BY HENRY NEWBOLT, D.LITT.

By the custom of our Society and by my own good fortune, I have been deputed to give formal welcome to Mrs. Alice Meynell upon her admission to our fellowship. In the too short time allowed to me I have several points to make: The first, though not, I confess, to me the most important, is her extraordinary fitness for membership of an academic body. Mrs. Meynell comes to us bringing her sheaves with her. She has already done much to further the one definite purpose for which our Committee exists—the maintenance of some principle of law or order in the forming of our intuitions and in the verbal expression of them. In an age which has too often failed to distinguish between originality and crude haste, between freedom and mere sloppiness, it

would be impossible to over-estimate the value of Mrs. Meynell's Essays to the general public. For these small studies of things apparently small, with their Athenian ingenuity, their Spartan terseness, their mediæval clearness and profundity, were, at their first appearance, read and marked, not by a narrow circle of the initiated, but by a crowd which looked eagerly for them week by week in the pages of an evening paper. Their influence was mainly by example, but sometimes also by precept; though even then the dose is concealed with a perfectly maternal skill. The essay on "Symmetry and Incident" is ostensibly a contrast of Greek with Japanese Art. The two opposed principles are traced in music, in domestic architecture, in the plastic arts, and into the argument is dropped a single unnoticeable sentence of six words, "The poets have sought irregular metres." It is not until seven delightful pages have won the reader to a general surrender that this point is again attacked and carried by the aid of a quotation from Coventry Patmore. "As all the music of verse

arises, not from infraction, but from inflection of the law of the set metre, so the greatest poets have been those the *modulus* of whose verse has been most variously and delicately inflected, in correspondence with feelings and passions which are the inflection of moral law in their theme. Law puts a strain upon feeling, and feeling responds with a strain upon law.” This has all the appearance of a conciliatory formula; but there are some of us who would have wished before accepting it to hear who sets “the set metre,” and how Patmore would apply his rule to the case of Walt Whitman; and even now it is, I hope, not too late to hope for another essay from Mrs. Meynell, an essay, perhaps, on “Law and Life,” illustrated from the works of our neo-Georgian poets. Their art she would probably class with the “nimble” and “unessential” art of Japan, as having “an obvious life, and a less obvious law.” “But with Greece,” she has said, “abides the obvious law and the less obvious life . . . and this seems to be the nobler and more pardonable relation.” Whether that

be universally true or not, at any rate it is pure academic doctrine, and all of a piece with Mrs. Meynell's avowed preference for words of classical derivation, from the use of which she hopes for a certain spiritualising and subtilising effect. A reaction towards the side of the Latin element in the English language is, she once urged, "in some sort an ethical need for our day. We want to quell the exaggerated decision of monosyllables." Since the words were written we have seen a counter-reaction ; but it is not impossible that we are now once more upon the eve of a Latin period. At any rate, the preference is an academic preference, and it has, like the love of a Greek symmetry, been exemplified by Mrs. Meynell herself in a noble and perdurable art.

But that art, though it has a great ancestry and has inherited much of the clear-cut classical beauty, has other qualities too which are not less sympathetic ; qualities which are modern, which are English, which are even, if I dare say so, Japanese. I remember Mr. Kohitsu, the Mikado's hereditary art expert,

saying when he was in England, that he found a headache in all our Academic pictures. "Your painters," he said, "put their subject upon the canvas beautifully, but they go on to paint four more subjects in the four corners, and these distract my eyes." In Mrs. Meynell's work, as in that of the painters of Japan, there is no such distraction. There may be nimbleness, but there is never the unessential. The subject is given, and it matters not how small or even how fragmentary the presentment may be, because the thing given is not dwarfed or limited by the presence of other things, for the moment at least irrelevant; it is given in mysterious clearness, with all the possibilities of its own universe about it, visible enough, but visible to no eyes that can be made to ache.

This to me is the most distinguishing characteristic of Mrs. Meynell's Essays, and the one for which I most admire them. Her literary criticism, for example, is a thing of isolated moments, but it is always ripe, and has always its own flavour; I delight in the gleaning of her stray grapes more than in all the vintage of

the German school, who have made so great an industry out of the chemical treatment of literature. “Master Shallow has the *Welt-schmerz*”—it is, I think, in the essay on “Pathos” that she mocks so pleasantly at the critic of “importunate sensibility,” who must squeeze pathos out of Shakespeare’s lightest laughter. How different is her own method—how a half page of hers on Mercutio, on Ophelia, on Tom-a-Bedlam, flashes upon the mind’s retina an aspect that remains with us in the succeeding darkness, and leaves us moreover with the desire, and almost with the power, to call up other images in a like brilliancy. How lightly, again, she throws in at the very end of an essay (on the “Spirit of Place”) a sudden memory of Milton’s “Curfew,” “that sways across one of the greatest of all the sea-shores of poetry—‘the wide-watered.’” How swift and deadly is her attack on Macaulay and his like for their unchivalrous treatment of Dr. Johnson’s wife—and yet when the half dozen pages are done how utterly their meanness has perished—even their victim has

faded away, and the light glows only upon the figure of the great and solitary man who had loved her. And how delicately, in a more mischievous mood, can she administer a backhand stroke to Stevenson in his self-named part of the “Sedulous Ape.” In the essay on “The Seventeenth Century,” she had noted in a phrase of Mrs. Lucy Hutchinson’s, a “Stevenson-like character—a kind of gesture of language.” Long afterwards a letter of Stevenson’s was published, which showed that he had read Mrs. Hutchinson and disliked her. Mrs. Meynell’s footnote records this, and adds, “He was young at that time of writing, and perhaps hardly aware of the lesson in English he had taken from her. We know that he never wasted the opportunity for such a lesson, and the fact . . . is established—it is not too bold to say so—by my recognition of his style in her own.” The figure of Louis Stevenson is one of the best loved in literature, but a being so human could never be beyond the reach of humour, and here we see him caught in a ridiculous attitude long outgrown, as we have

often seen ourselves in the forgotten photographs of our youth.

It is not only persons, real or imaginary, that spangle those essays with diamond points; ideas are scattered still more abundantly throughout them, and in the same way glitter for a moment only but with permanent effect. No matter what the subject—Art, Letters, Winds and Waters, Wayfaring, the Colour of Life, or the Rhythm of Life, Mrs. Meynell never thinks of being exhaustive, never fails of being suggestive. Of all her thoughts the most beautiful are those on children and on the sense of Time, and when, as in the last three essays of her book, she thinks of both together, then she stirs in us most surely the feeling of the smallness and the significance of human life.

Mrs. Meynell's poems, too, are terse, significant, and symmetrical, but they, too, are not remarkable for Greek feeling or for Latin language—they are not so much of classical descent as of English. Their form is their own—the natural expression of their very

modern intuitions—but they have a trait or two that would seem to be inherited from kindred in the past, notably a union of wit and religious emotion, as rare now as it was characteristic of the seventeenth century in England. The contemporaries of Herbert and of Vaughan would have revelled in her use of images; for with her an image is neither a mere metaphor—another way of saying the the same thing—nor a simile—a little separate picture introduced to adorn a narrative—but a real transposition by which the very key of a song is changed and the melody gains a quality which the simple major could not give. Mrs. Meynell's transposition is always complete—in her work an image is not a conceit, a resemblance to be suddenly shown and tossed aside again; it is something essential, an aspect to be followed throughout, almost always giving more insight than it promised, and often becoming the very substance of the poem. A very old and familiar image—that of the sea-tide—has in this way filled two poems, one with its flow, the other—the more beautiful—with its ebb.

“ So in the tide of life that carries me
From where thy true heart dwells,
Waves of my thoughts and memories turn to thee
With lessening farewells ;

“ Waving of hands ; dreams, when the day forgets ;
A care half lost in cares ;
The saddest of my verses ; dim regrets ;
Thy name among my prayers.”

There is a very unusual honesty in the confession of those lessening farewells ; they are like the startling franknesses of Donne, they give a new psychological situation where an old one might have been expected. Mrs. Meynell’s genius is sundered by leagues of tenderness and self-restraint from that of the fierce and gloomy Dean, but she seems to me to resemble him in just this originality of metaphysical drama. Certainly there is no modern poem more original than the “ Letter from a Girl to her own Old Age,” none since Donne which looks more profoundly or more sadly into the abysmal deeps of personality. It is the longest poem in the book, but every fragment of it is significant :

Listen, and when thy hand this paper presses,
 O time-worn woman, think of her who blesses
 What thy thin fingers touch, with her caresses.

* * * *

“I have not writ this letter of divining
 To make a glory of thy silent pining,
 A triumph of thy mute and strange declining.

“Only one youth, and the bright life was shrouded.
 Only one morning, and the day was clouded.
 And one old age with all regrets is crowded.

* * * *

“Pardon the girl: such strange desires beset her.
 Poor woman, lay aside the mournful letter
 That breaks thy heart: the one who wrote, forgot
 her:

“The one who now thy faded features guesses,
 With filial fingers thy grey hair caresses,
 With morning tears thy mournful twilight blesses.”

This is high poetry, and yet, as Mrs. Meynell has herself told us, there is a higher—“Plain, behind oracles, it is; and past All symbols, simple; perfect, heavenly-wild.” In her own poem called “Renouncement” there is this higher quality—the plainness and simplicity of a common experience, the heavenly wildness

of the common passion that breaks all fetters made by men for each other. I cannot foresee the generation which that poem will not delight.

And now, Madam, I have been long enough about my greeting; let me end by reminding you that for whatever heresy or inadequacy you may have found in my discourse I am alone responsible; I am sure of representing my colleagues in one point only—in the grateful admiration with which I bid you welcome to our Society.

PRESENTATION OF BOUQUET.

Mrs. MARGARET L. WOODS said: Mrs. Meynell, Lady Ritchie hoped to be present to-day but regrets she is not well enough to come out. She and I, as the two women members of the Academic Committee, ask you to accept these flowers as a small token of the great pleasure your work has given us and the pleasure we feel in welcoming you as a colleague.

To Mr. *
GOLDSWORTHY LOWES DICKINSON.
By ARTHUR C. BENSON, C.V.O.

I REMEMBER, Mr. Chairman, that the last time that I had to perform this honourable office for the Dean of St. Paul's, I felt that I had needlessly strained both rhetoric and grammar by putting my panegyric in the second person, and thus being obliged publicly to remind the Dean of facts well known to himself, but which I had had for the sake of accuracy privately to investigate. To-day I will have no regard to Mr. Dickinson's modesty and reserve, but I will relate him and account for him, and that will be the same as praising him. We are so careful in England not to endanger the moral fibre of those whom we admire, that we can seldom bring ourselves to praise a fellow-citizen worthily, till he is beyond the reach of our esteem. For once, then, let an author hear what

the old title-page calls the “true, joyous, and recreative” history of himself and his work. My “take-off,” as the athletes say, shall be plain fact; that Mr. Dickinson was the son of a father well known and honoured for vivid and artistic portraiture, and, after a successful career at Charterhouse, entered King’s College, Cambridge, on the same day as myself, some four-and-thirty years ago, to the long and lasting benefit of that great college. More than once was I pitted against Mr. Dickinson in academic contests, and never once was I victorious. But it is even now pleasant to me to reflect that in the year when he won the Chancellor’s Medal for an English poem on Savonarola, I obtained the second place with an honourable mention. I mistrusted the verdict of case-hardened examiners at the time, but I have good reason to think, in the light of subsequent events, that they were right. Mr. Dickinson was later elected a Fellow and Lecturer of the College, to the best interests of which he has ever since ungrudgingly and disinterestedly devoted himself, sowing fruitful

seed with all his might, by sound teaching, by a high example of devotion to studies that have lived and burgeoned under his skilful hand, and, most of all, perhaps, by delightful and stimulating talk, lavished freely and royally on the humblest as well as on the most brilliant auditors. He has been a charming sophist! And, for the benefit of the ladies, as Bishop Wordsworth used to say when he translated a Greek quotation at gatherings of the clergy, I would add that the word sophist in its original meaning carries with it no sense of disingenuous ingenuity, but merely means a man who makes others wise, for a most inadequate reward. Socrates, for instance, was a sophist, and others whose names it would be pretentious to recite. And this characteristic, I would say, of Mr. Dickinson's mode of life is one which I should like to hold up for special recognition here, because it is one that is apt to go unrewarded —his readiness, I mean, to discuss any subject, simple or abstruse, with any chance companion, pupil, or friend, or acquaintance, high or low, mean or distinguished, dull or clever, and to do

it with so subtle a grace and so self-effacing a modesty as to leave his interlocutor hardly aware of the benefits received, and only astonished at his own insight and eloquence. Fine and beautiful as Mr. Dickinson's contributions have been to literature, I would like to emphasise the fact that as a peripatetic philosopher he has shone, like the sun, on the ignorant and unthankful as well as on the able and the grateful. Those who know his inspiring and illuminating book on the 'Meaning of Good' may get some inkling of the patience, the urbanity, the persuasiveness, with which he will pursue a subject and moderate a discussion. For myself, I will say that I look back to evenings, less frequent than I could wish—for Mr. Dickinson is a busy man—in which I have experienced the supreme charm of perfectly unaffected and equal talk—equal, that is, not in the value of the contribution made by other talkers, but in the sense that, like a wise magician, he has never allowed his companions to suspect how much of encouragement and stimulus they have owed to the deft waving of his hidden wand.

The time would fail me if I attempted to describe all Mr. Dickinson's contributions to what Walter Pater described as serious and elegant literature, but, as it is on this account that we welcome him here to-day, as a member of our Academic Committee, I will speak briefly of a little handful of his work.

I would first mention the 'Letters of John Chinaman,' which is hardly, I imagine, so much an attempt to enter philosophically into the Oriental view of life, as to criticise our own raw and crude civilisation, with its tumultuous and half-tamed forces, from the idealised point of view of a civilisation which has converted into instinct, by long tradition, the principles which *nominally* direct our lives—gentleness, tolerance, the order which comes of sympathy, the work that grows out of a realisation of the miseries of idleness—principles of life which we praise officially, and contradict in action every day. We have not yet learned the art of sharing our happiness, and, in our busy and active hemisphere, it is still a matter of self-congratulation rather than of pain to have won advantages

which others have not won. I know of no book which in so brief a compass, without recrimination or derision, holds up so faithful a mirror to our Western failure in vital sympathy.

Then there is the 'Greek View of Life,' a book which is a delicate interpretation of a certain mood—because, if we can penetrate the secret of the inspiration of the Greeks, we have to realise with regret that it was but a *mood* of humanity, which the conditions of the world may forbid us ever exactly to recapture, based as it was upon the careless acceptance of slavish conditions for the mass of mankind, and upon the ignoring of any brotherly debt to the submerged many. It seems hard to believe that so rapturous an individualism can ever again be possible ; and the skill of the book lies in Mr. Dickinson's power of shutting off, so to speak, the light of modern ideas, which process is the first requisite of scientific reconstruction.

But this particular gift, which is a marked characteristic of Mr. Dickinson's work—the power, that is, of throwing himself with an intense insight into a particular point of view,

and realising its restrictions as unflinchingly as its inspirations—is best illustrated by the ‘Modern Symposium,’ in which a number of typical figures meet in a country-house, and soliloquise in turn. The art of that book is very great, for its effect upon the mind is to convert a reader with an almost shameless rapidity to siding with each speaker in turn. This can only be done by the faculty best expressed by the Greek word *εὐτραπέλαια*, which means a delightful sort of versatility, full of sympathy and charm—the versatility, may we say, of the plumage of the dove, with all its shifting gleams, which the beholder wishes might continue so for ever, but when the lights are broken and re-made, he is glad that they are changed. And here, I would say, lies the crowning merit of Mr. Dickinson’s work, in the fact that he can do full and practical justice to a number of contradictory views. It is essentially a dramatic gift, and the delicacy of it lies in the fact that one does not, as is the case, for instance, in some of Browning’s characterisations, recognise the ingenious and voluble author making a passionate outcry be-

hind varied masks ; but one rather discerns a friendly person handling the same facts with a perfectly authentic interpretation, or even misinterpretation, of them.

Then there is 'The Meaning of Good,' a Platonic dialogue in the best sense of the word; because we must remember that Plato, by his hold on a scene, his fine characterisation, his dramatic interplay, is as much the parent of the romancer as of the philosopher—indeed more ; for Plato has at once the darting suggestiveness and the unsolved mystery of life for ever in view. Indeed, I was talking to a very able young man the other day, who had taken up the study of philosophy, and finds himself ill at ease there, about this very book. "It was that book which did the mischief," he said plaintively. "I was deceived into thinking that philosophy was beautiful."

With what skill and urbanity and zest in that book is the covert patiently and delicately beaten to start the elusive bird of wisdom ! The sorties, the interruptions, the clamours of practical men, with what tolerance they are handled ! It is

into life, and not away from life, that he would lead us, offering, not abstract formulas, but a living interpretation. The book, moreover, which is even more our concern here, is full of literary effects, handled with grace and due proportion. Let me quote a few lines:

“Well, anyhow,” says the man of science, “do you admit the existence of the Bad?”

“Oh, yes,” I cried, “as much as you like, for it is bad to my mind that we should be in a difficult quest of Good instead of in secure possession of it. I do not pretend that what I have called the growth of the soul from within is a smooth and easy process, a quiet unfolding of leafy green in a bright and windless air. If I recognise the delight of expansion, I recognise also the pain of repression—the thwarted desire, the unfulfilled hope, the passion vain and abortive.”

There is a glow, a vitality, about this and many such passages which belongs rather to the passion of the poet than to the dispassionateness of the philosopher. I can conceive no better fortune for a young man in the grip of that

scepticism which comes from the sudden clash of ardent idealism with the hard facts of life, than to meet with this book, and to learn that truth need be neither derisively applied nor sentimentally misinterpreted, that candour can be courteous, and that virtue can be persuasive. The whole book is, indeed, a fine protest against the dull insolence of technicality, and a vindication of the truth that ideas are free, and not the property of sects and schools.

I would say a few words on Mr. Dickinson's little volumes, 'Religion and Immortality' and 'Religion: a Criticism and a Forecast.' These are frankly written from the point of view of one who cannot believe in specific revelation "as an avenue to truth"; but they are also written with characteristic tolerance and sympathy by one who does not theorise about human nature, and sees, not only the vast force that underlies religion, but the vital need which it seeks to satisfy. The relation of the Known to the Unknown—that is a part of it; and the other part is the haunting sense which makes

itself felt in human nature of having somehow missed an ideal within its reach, and the consequent need of reconciliation.

The inquiry is pursued without any attempt at tactful compromise, any surrender of clearly apprehended truth, and yet without any of that melancholy combativeness which lends force to the cynical epigram that religion too often takes the form of hostility to different aspects of the same creed. The clearness, the logical progress, the delicate proportion of the argument are beyond praise ; while here again, as in all Mr. Dickinson's writings, the almost homely simplicity of statement is relieved and enforced throughout by impassioned interludes of lyrical fervour and beauty. Thus he writes :

“ Faith is the sense and the call of the open horizon . . . It is the impulse to grow and expand, and, just because it is that, it has itself no form, but may assume any form. It is a taper burning, now bright, now dim, and changing colour and substance with every change in the stuff it consumes. The frailest thing we know, it is also the least perishable, for it is a

tongue of the central fire that burns at the heart of the world.”

And again: “The conception that death ends all does not empty life of its worth ; but it destroys in my judgment its most precious element, that which transfigures all the rest ; it obliterates the gleam on the snow, the planet in the east ; it shuts off the great adventure, the adventure beyond death.”

I would conclude by saying a few words about the last of Mr. Dickinson’s books, ‘Appearances,’ which I have found a deeply stimulating volume. After a long period of quiet academic work, he had the opportunity of a year of travel. There was the test ! Was he going to find the world a place which rudely contradicted his sheltered ideals, or was it going to confirm them, to enlarge them, to expand them ? He visited India, China, Japan, America : the book consists of brief and salient impressions, and the first relief is to find them free alike from the triviality and the over-emphasis which are the vices of modern art. I cannot attempt to summarise them, but I see in the book the same firm vision, the same

vivid insight, the same perfect fairness that I find in all Mr. Dickinson's work. Seldom has the problem of America, its gigantic force, its hungry intensity, its lack of finish, its instinct for peaceful conquest, been more incisively and yet more generously described.

Mr. Dickinson's conclusion is that the hope of the world lies in the development of souls: "that development," he says, "consists in a constant expansion of interest away from and beyond one's own immediate interests into the activities of the world at large. The command of life is the same—to expand out of oneself into the life of the world."

That is, I think, a great conclusion, because all who put any passion into life are between two dangers—the danger of losing self in a narrow range of preferences, and the danger of losing personal intensity in a bewildered contemplation of social forces. The truth, summarised so long ago, that a man must lose himself if he is to find himself, remains a hard fact of life; and what I claim for Mr. Dickinson's work is no less than this, that with a fine

economy of art, a resolute discarding of loose phrases and vague ornament, he has been able to present the view, that it is fulness and largeness of life which is the only end worth pursuing; not in concentrating oneself upon little vivid effects, but in employing art to clarify vision, and in then setting oneself with sympathy and imagination, and severe yet wide justice, to confront in hope and joyfulness the mighty riddle of the world.

FOURTH AWARD OF THE EDMOND DE POLIGNAC PRIZE.

Mr. JOHN MASEFIELD said: We end this November meeting of the Academic Committee with the presentation of the Polignac Prize for the year 1913. The Prize (the sum of £100, given each year very generously by the Princesse de Polignac) is awarded by the votes of the Academic Committee to the writer of that book (published in the preceding twelve months) which in the opinion of the judges has most of the qualities of style and of promise.

Several books of the year 1913 had these qualities; it was not easy to choose among them. But the Committee at last decided that those qualities were found at their fullest in two poems by Mr. Ralph Hodgson, "The Bull" and "The Song of Honour," both remarkable works in that they take one to a world of delight and strangeness, with a

sustained lyric swiftness rare in modern poetry. Mr. Hodgson writes verse because it is, like music, a finer kind of speech to be used where the common kind fails.

The poem, "The Bull," is a study of elemental life on its stage of wild nature under the conditions of constant war. It is the picture of an old bull, just beaten from his herd and dying, in whose confused wits the vision of his past is turning. There is a primitive largeness and freedom in the unenclosed world in which he stands, and he himself is just life in the rough, reduced to its simplest terms, what it is and how it ends, a strength that grows and is active, and then dies down and becomes a prey. It is remarkable for the ease and beauty of the verse, and for this, that it provides the fancy with a means of escape into the ideal region where things are so much more real, the light so much deeper, and the adventures so rare, and where an old bull dying is a tremendous event.

It was said of Shakespeare that he "had the phantsie very strong." Most good lyric

poets have the phantsie strong, and it is this faculty of phantsie which makes Mr. Hodgson's second poem, "The Song of Honour," so remarkable. A good phantsie is a starry possession, and Mr. Hodgson has used his starry power with a lovely fresh abundance, like a man in ecstasy. The scheme of the poem is that the poet, withdrawn one night, watching the stars in a lonely place, hears suddenly the song of the spiritual powers of all beautiful and beneficent things, coming upon him with a breathless rush, till he is tranced. Like the other poem, this poem is a means of escape to a more glittering world than this. Few will read it without feeling that the adventure happened to himself, or wishing that it had. Very few will read it without delight at the wonder and hurry of the rapturous cry, poured out so swiftly and so sweetly.

It is a great pleasure to me to express here my admiration of Mr. Hodgson's work, and to hand him on behalf of the Academic Committee the Edmond de Polignac Prize for his two poems.

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